BAKHTIYĀR KHALJĪ AND THE PRINCIPALITY OF TIRHUT

BY

Hasan Nishat Ansari

The Karṇāṭa dynasty of Simroon[1] was ruling over Tirhut when Bakhtiyār Khaljī captured South Bihar. Tirhut was hemmed in by four states, Nepal in the north, Bengal in the east, the Turkish Chiefdom (formely the Pāla Kingdom) of Bihar in the south and Turkish Sultanate (formerly the Gāhaḍavāla Kingdom of Kannauj-Kāsī) in the west. The Karṇāṭa rājās of Tirhut had come into conflict with the Turko-Muslims since the time of Bakhtiyār Khaljī. According to the *Bayāz* of Mullā Taqia of Akbar's days, Muḥammad Bakhtiyār Khaljī at one period in the course of his (successful) military campaign in Lakhnauti marched against Narsinghdeva (Narsimhadeva), the Karṇāṭa rājā of Tirhut, who submitted to Bakhtiyār and was allowed to retain the territory or *wilayat of Tirhut and Darbhanga* on condition of payment of *Kharāj* (tribute). Thus the Karṇāṭa ruler of Tirhut was reduced to the status of tributary ruler and compelled to acknowledge Turkish suzerainty or paramount power by Bakhtiyār. Following this Bakhtiyār proceeded back in the direction of Lakhnauti. Mullā Taqia goes on to say that the rājā regularly sent[2] the agreed tribute (Kharāj) to Bengal up to the time of Ghiyāsuddīn 'Iwaz Khaljī (A. H 6C8/A. D. 1211 or 1212—A. H. 624/ A. D. 1227). It is not unlikely that the third ruler of the Karṇāṭa dynasty, Narasimhadeva (A. D. 1188—1227) was a tributary of Lakṣmaṇasena (A. D. 1185—1206) of Bengal and was forced to be a tributary of Muḥammad Bakhtiyār, who had successfully intruded into Bengal.

Tirhut was bounded by the Himalayas on the north, the Kosi on the east, the Gandak on the west and the Ganges on the south. It comprised almost all North Bihar and the strip of Nepal Terai.[3] Apparently

---

1 Simraon (Simarampura) a town in the Nepal Terai, just beyond the frontier of the modern Champaran district of North Bihar.

2 Mullā Taqia : *Bayāz*, Ma'āsir (May & June 1969), p. 79. The date A. H. 599 /A. D. 1203 as given by Mullā Taqia for Bakhtiyār's attack on Lakhnauti is early by about a year. The correct date would thus be A. H. 600/A. D. 1204-1205.

3 Mishra, V. "Ancient Mithilā, its Boundary, Names and Area" *IHQ*. XXXV (1959), pp. 151-165.

the country of Tirhut was not easy to subdue as the jungles were difficult to penetrate and the rivers formed deep and broad moats difficult to cross. It has been suggested[1] that geography made Tirhut almost a closed country in her long past and it remained immune from the Turkish political influence in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. But this is not supported by available facts. Before the coming of the Turks, Tirhut had been successfully invaded and subdued by the Pālas and the Karṇāṭas. Tirhut acknowledged the sway of the Turks, and its Hindū rājās allowed the Turkish armies to move from the west to the east and vice-versa.[5] Ghiyāsuddīn Tughluq, the Turkish ruler, subdued it in the first quarter of the fourteenth century. Further, it appears from Dharmasvāmin's biography that in the thirteenth century the ferry boats that were taking passengers across the Ganges from Magadha to Tirhut (and vice-versa) were big ones, sufficient to accomodate three hundred persons.[6] Therefore Tirhut could not remain isolated from the main currents of North Indian politics. The regions to the west were subjected to the Turko-Muslim political influence which was successfully making its headway in an eastward direction. Rai Monmohan Chakravarti[7] and R. C. Majumdar[8] hold the view that in the initial period of the Turkish expansion it remained immune from the new political influence until Ghiyāsuddīn Tughluq in the first quarter of the fourteenth century subjugated it, but this theory cannot be substantiated. While Rai Monmohan Chakravarti attributes the immunity of Tirhut from the Turkish political influence to geographical factors, R. C. Majumdar thinks that Mithilā was regarded as an inoffensive petty Hindū state not unwilling to bow down to a strong Sultān.[9] But the Turks seem to have exerted political influence on its rulers as early as

4 Rai Manmohan Chakravarti, *JASB* (NS), XI (1915), pp. 407-408.

5 *Biography of Dharmasvāmin*, p. 62.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 61. Invaders can and did enter India through such entrances as the southern land-route across the desert from Iraq and Persia into Baluchistan and Sind and the mountain passes of the north-west frontier. Besides this, seas and rivers could be crossed and armies sent across the waters. The Arabs are credited with having sent naval expeditions from Oman and Iraq, to the western coast of India in the seventh and eighth centuries.

7 *JASB* (NS), XI (1915), pp. 407-408.

8 *HCIP*, VI (The Delhi Sultanate), pp. 396, 397, 399. Also, *UTHM*, pp. 272-273 where Upendra Thakur uncritically accepts the opinion of Rai Monmohan Chakravarti that the natural boundaries of the land kept the enemies at bay.

9 *HCIP*, VI, pp. 396, 397, 399.

the time of Bakhtiyār Khaljī. In his time its soil was trodden by the Turkish soldiery, and its ruler was made a tributary vassal. In the absence of any contemporary evidence to the contrary, the version of Mullā Taqia about Bakhtiyār's march into Tirhut cannot be discarded. It almost escaped direct Turkish conquest because Muhammad Bakhtiyār concentrated his attention on South Bihar, which was closer to his fiefs of Bhiuli and Bhagwat in the Uttar Pradesh. Moreover, after occupaying Bihar conquest of Bengal became his next objective. K. R. Qanungo, however, opines that as the eastward expansion of the Turkish power through north Bihar was at this time barred by the powerful Hindū Kingdom of Mithilā under the Karṇāṭa dynasty, the momentum of the Turkish onslaught under the leadership of Muhammad Bakhtiyār acquired a greater driving force in south Bihar.[10] But the weakness of the Hindū kingdom of Tirhut is evident from the fact that subsequently the rājā did submit to Bakhtiyār without even putting up a fight.[11]

Bakhtiyār perhaps led the military expedition to Tirhut from Bengal from Rajmahal side and crossed the Kosi in the district of Purnea. Mullā Taqia would have us believe that Bakhtiyār marched to Tirhut from Lakhnauti (whence his way probably lay through Jharkhand in South Bihar). Subsequently one of Bakhtiyār's successors Malik 'Izzuddīn Tughan Khan (A. H. 631/A.D. 1233-34—A. H. 642/A. D. 1245), made an inroad into the country of Tirhut from Lakhnauti.[12] The contention that during Narasimhadeva's time Muhammad Bakhtiyār Khaljī passed with his army through Tirhut on his way to Bengal is not supported by Mullā Taqia. As it would appear, S. H. Askari has misinterpreted Mullā Taqia, for he presumes that Bakhtiyār invaded Tirhut and made the ruler of the Karṇāṭa dynasty his vassal, before embarking on his lightning raid on Bengal.[13] But Mullā Taqia's version implies that Bakhtiyār marched first into Lakhnauti (via South Bihar) and thence to Tirhut. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Turkish armies on their way to Bengal from the direction of Delhi frequently moved through Awadh via Bihar and thus did not try to move north of the Ganges; on their return march to Awadh or beyond they used the same route.[14] This can only mean that

10 *DUHB*, II, p. 2.

11 Mullā Taqia: *Bayāz*, Maāsir (May and June 1949), p. 79.

12 Minhāj, p. 246.

13 Askari, S. H. "A Review Of Bihar During The Turko-Afghān Period" Current Studies (Patna: 1954), p. 7 fn 1. Refer also Chaudhary, Radhakrishna, "Early Muslim Invasions of Mithila" *JIH*, XL (1962), p. 377.

14 For the Use of these southern routes see Minhāj, p. 163; *RT* (Tr.), pp. 88-89, 103; Ferishtah, Tārīkh, I, p. 85.

though the principality of Tirhut lay on the way from Delhi to Bengal and vice-versa the Turkish forces at times avoided it. Tirhut was not affected by those invaders of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, who marched into Bengal via south Bihar leaving the territory north of the Ganges undisturbed. But there are instances showing that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Turkish armies on their way to Bengal also passed through Tirhut and vice-versa.[15] In other words whenever possible the imperialists preferably used this route because the southern route through Jharkhand region presented great difficulties.

The nature and extent of Bakhtiyār's influence over North Bihar is inferable to some degree. Tirhut while nominally under the sway of the Turks was really governed by its Hindū rājā, who acknowledged his subordination to Bakhtiyār and regularly sent the agreed tribute to the Bengal exchequer, but in all other respect he was independent. Blochman[16] and Wolseley Haig[17] (who has apparently drawn upon the former's statement) without however mentioning any authority, say that Muhammad Bakhtiyār took possession of the south eastern parts of Mithilā. Minhāj, the author of *Tabaqāt-i-Nāṣirī*, is silent on this point.

15 Minhāj, p. 159; *BTFS*, pp. 451; 587-589; 595-596; *RT* (Tr.), pp. 91-92. Refer also *Biography of Dharmasvāmin*, pp. 61-62 which clearly hints that at times Turkish armies passed through Tirhut from the west to the east and vice-versa.

When Ali Mardan Khalji (A. H. 606-608/A. D. 1209/10-1211/12) was vested with the government of Lakhnauti (West Bengal) by Qutbuddin Aibak, he is said to have crossed the river Kosi or *Aab-i-Kos* (which is in North Bihar). Refer, *Minhāj*, pp. 158-159. Ali Mardan was allowed to cross the Kosi (in North Bihar) 'because the ruler of Mithilā, Narasimhadeva, besides being a tributary of the Turks, maintained friendly relations with them. There is no evidence to show that any resistance was offered to him in Tirhut while he was passing through it on his way to Lakhnauti (West Bengal). S. H. Askari, however, observes that he could not have been allowed to pass unmolested through an unsubmissive and hostile region (Current Studies, Patna : 1954, p. 7). R. K. Choudhary suggests that the amicable relationship between Narsimhadeva and Muhammad Ghori enabled Ali Mardan to cross the Kosi (*JIH*, xl (1962), p. 378). But a few years before this came to pass Muhammad Ghori had died and Qutbuddin Aibak had taken over. Ali Mardan crossed the Kosi in the time of Qutbuddin Aibak for just the same reason that Narasimhadeva maintained amicable relations with the Turks and paid tributes to them even after the change in royal succession.

16 Blochman, H. "Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal", *JASB*, xlii, (1873), p. 221.

17 *CHI*, iii, p. 42.

K. R. Qanungo[18] also assumes without citing any evidence that Bakhtiyār held portions of Purnea, north Monghyr and Saharsa[19] districts forming the riverine tracts on the north bank of the Ganges from the mouth of the Gandak river to that of the Kosi. Bakhtiyār was the founder of Bakhtiyarpur,[20] a village in the extreme north of the Khagaria subdivision of Monghyr district. From this it may be presumed that he exercised direct sway over the lower south-eastern parts of Tirhut including portions of North Monghyr. It would be reasonable to infer that he also seized southern parts of Saharsa and Purnea districts.

18 *DUHB*, ii, p. 13.

19 Formerly northern Bhagalpur.

20 For a description of the place, *Monghyr District Gazetteer* (1960), p. 448.

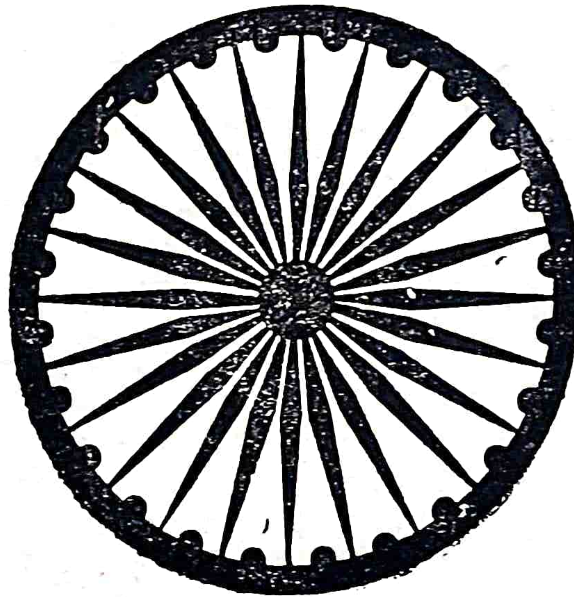
He was also the founder of an old village carrying the same name sometime after the Turkish conquest of Bihar area. This lies in the extreme north of the Biharsharif subdivision of Patna district close to the town of Bihar, which was conquered by him in A. D. 1199. Refer, *Patna District Gazetteer* for location. The province or division of South Bihar was subjugated by Bakhtiyār between A. D. 1199-1203.

THE JOURNAL
OF
THE BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY

VOL. LV JANUARY—DECEMBER, 1969 PARTS I-IV

CHIEF EDITOR

Dr. S. V. Sohoni, M.A., I.C.S., Vidyāvācaspati



PUBLISHED BY

THE BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY, PATNA

Price Rs. 30/-